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THE
Nature, Obligation, and Measures
OF
CONSCIENCE,

Deliver'd In A
SERMON

PREACH'D At

Leicester,

AT THE
ASSIZES Held There,

July 25th, 1706.

By HENRY SACHEVERELL, M.A.
Fellow of Magdalen-College, Oxon.

Acts xxiii. 1.

*And Paul earnestly beholding the Council, said, Men
and Brethren, I have liv'd in all Good Conscience,
before God, until this Day.*

Publish'd at the Request of the Gentlemen of the Grand-Jury.

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Fetter-Lane, 1710.

To the Right Worshipful Charles Morris,
Esq; High-Sheriff of the County of
Leicester, and to the Honourable Gentle-
men of the Grand-Jury.

Sir William Villiers, Bar.
Sir Gilbert Pickering, Bart.
Sir Richard Halford, Bart.
Sir George Beaumont, Bart.
Sir William Halford, Kt. and Bart.
Sir Edward Wigley, Knt.
Edward Smith, Esq;
James Winstanley, Esq;
George Ashby, Esq;

Charles Jennings, Esq;
Thomas Sheffington, Esq;
Robert Wilson, Esq;
Rowland Browne, Esq;
Bartlett Streete, Esq;
James Halsall, Esq;
William Hartopp, Esq;
William Wells, Gent.
Leonard Vow, Gent.

Gentlemen,

IF this Discourse has any thing considerable, to recommend it to the World, it is chiefly owing to Your Favour and Indulgence, as having had the Honour of Your Patience, in its Delivery, and Your Joint Commands for its Publication. I wish, I had Treated this Weighty Subject equal to its Dignity: it being so Necessary to be thoroughly understood, at a time, when the Confederate Adversaries of Our Church, presume as much to Found Dominion in Conscience, as they did formerly in Grace: when They not only Plead the Liberty of the One, to Resist and Quench the Other, but by countenancing a Form of Godliness, Deny the Power thereof, and Destroy the very Substance of Religion, under a Specious Appearance of Defending it. But whatever Success, my Endeavours in this Matter, may meet with, it is the Peculiar Happiness, and Advantage of the Church of England, that it can yet, notwithstanding all Opposition, Glory in so many Unblemished Patriots, and Undaunted Champions for the Support of its Constitution; whose Lives are the Best Illustrations of its Doctrines; whose Merits are as Great and Conspicuous as their Fortunes; whose Conscience is as Unsullied as their Honour; and who, by the Justice, and Regularity of their Principles and Actions, have Compleated the Character of a True Christian, as well as that of an Accomplish'd Gentleman.

Were the Shining Examples you give to Mankind, as Happily Imitated by all Persons of the Rank and Condition, neither Our Church, or State, wou'd have any Reason to Fear any Danger from its Avow'd Enemies, or Pretended Friends: and that You may Live long to Con-
troul and Frustrate the Designs of Both, is the Hearty Wish of

Gentlemen, Your most Humble Servant,

HENRY SACHEVERELL.



The Nature, Obligation, and Measures of CONSCIENCE.

Acts XXIII. 1.

And Paul earnestly beholding the Council, said, Men and Brethren, I have liv'd in all Good Conscience, before God, until this Day.

TH E S E Words are as 'twere a short History, and compendious Character of the Life of that Great Apostle St. Paul; and of the Upright and Sincere Conscience, that Adorn'd every Action in it. This was his Efficacious and Triumphant Argument, which he so boldly urges in his Vindication; that he was able to insist upon his Integrity, and appeal for its Proof to a Tryal before God, The Searcher of all Hearts, and the whole World, the visible Witnesses of his Practice; that *He had kept a Conscience void of Offence, towards God, and towards Men.* 'Twas This that Fortify'd him with such a Manly Spirit, and Unshaken Courage, to Outface all the malicious Accusations of his insidious Persecutors, to bear up with a steady Chearfulness against the many Miseries and Disasters of a troublesome Life, and put to Silence the Reproaches of his most implacable Enemies. When we see him Arraign'd before the insulting Jews, from whom he cou'd as little expect Justice, as Mercy, how did this Astonish Felix; that Lustful and Coverous Magistrate, who thought to have Condemn'd him, and made the Affrighted Judge Tremble, instead of his Suppos'd Criminal? Such is the Power of a pure and unblemish'd Conscience; it casts a distinguishing Lustre, and amiable Regard upon its Possessor, can dignify Chains and Fetters, turn a Prison into a Palace, render Poverty, and even Disgrace, Honourable, and command Reverence and Esteem from its most malignant Adversaries. To obtain and preserve which invaluable Blessing, no Difficulties or Labours can be so Painful, no Dangers or Distresses so Afflicting, no Suffering or Death so sharp and bitter, but what it will sustain, alleviate, and most amply reward.

The nicest and most important Enquiry, that the Mind can be employ'd in, both for its Improvement and Satisfaction, is a just search into its own State and Nature; whereby it may be capable of discovering its own Graces and Infirmities, to correct the one, and advance the other, and to ground it self upon a rational Peace, and secure Tranquility. Tho' indeed this requires no small Art and Care, thus to make the Soul descend and retire into herself, bend all her Faculties inwards, and become the nearer Object of her own Contemplation; to dive into her own obscure Recesses and Mansions, and trace through all the intricate Folds and Windings of the Heart, to unveil its lurking Hypocrisy, traverse its Springs and Motions, and to let a Light into those dark Corners of Iniquity, where Vice is first hatch'd and conceiv'd. Without this Spiritual Scrutiny, this Domestick Inquisition (as we may call it) in our Breast, a Man's Life can be never just and regular, or his Actions even and self-consistent, as being guided by no Law, and directed by no Conduct. Therefore every Man that pretends to the right use of his Reason, and does not Live and Act at random, must think himself concern'd to establish a certain Set of Fundamental Notions and Principles in his Thoughts; which upon a thorough Search, and mature Deliberation, he lays down and settles, as the eternal Basis

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and Touchstone of Truth, as an unalterable Scheme and Model of Morality to himself, and as the controuling, and governing Maxims of his practical Behaviour. This is what he dignifies with the awful Title of *Conscience*, and is that internal Compass of his Soul, by which he professes to steer the whole Course and Tenour of his Actions.

Now from the infinite Multiplicity, and variety of Opinions, wherein Men's Minds as much differ as their Features, there may seem to arise as many sorts of *Consciences*, as there are diversity of Judgments in the World; Hence we find Virtues and Vices taking their several Colours and Denominations, according to the different Capacity, or use of Reason, the sundry Tempers, Inclinations, Interests and Designs of Parties, that Form and Espouse such and such Jarring Sentiments. So that he who takes an impartial Survey of all the multifarious, unaccountable, and repugnant Conclusions of Mankind, and their Deportment consequent thereupon, and considers their Irreconcilable contrariety to each other; and yet sees with what tenacious Confidence, and perverse Obstinacy, they are on all sides embrac'd and asserted, will be inclinable to suspect, that there is no such thing as true *Conscience* in the World; or that Men are not yet agreed in the meaning of this amusing, but unintelligible Word: A Word, the Force of which, is much sooner felt than understood, that strikes the Senses deeper than the Judgment; and usually carries in it all the Mischief, that Ignorance and Prejudice, blind Zeal, and inveterate Malice, Enthusiasm, and Superstition are able to attempt and execute. Upon which account, this mistaken Word, *Conscience*, has been often found to be no better than a meer Sound and Shadow, to disguise the most fatal and devilish Impostures, to cover the blackest Treason and Rebellion, Heresy, Schism, and Blasphemy; and shelter the most astonishing Impiety under its specious, and sanctify'd Umbrage. For what else is it, that has been the Cause of almost all the Civil Wars, Persecutions, and Massacres, that for so many Years involv'd *Christendom* in Blood and Fury, destroy'd so many Princes, and Churches, with Regicide, and Sacrilege, depopulated so many Dominions, and lavish'd so much Treasure; and in a manner overturn'd the very Foundations of Christianity, under the goodly pretence of Religion? What is it, I say, but this Word, *Conscience*, Misunderstood, and Misapply'd, which like an Holy Sham, or rather Diabolical Inspiration, has seiz'd and possess'd the giddy, and senseless Multitude, with Infatuation, and Phrenzy, and driven them Headlong into their own, and their Country's Perdition? Nothing certainly has brought greater Calamities upon the World, or led the way to more dangerous Mistakes, than the want of a due Distinction in its Nature, and a just Limitation of it, in its Rights and Power: Which as 'tis a weighty Subject, proper for all times, as containing the Grounds of our Happiness or Misery, as well in this World as the next; so I presume, it may be in no wise unsuitable to the present Solemnity, which may frequently have no small share in the Examination of its Pretences, in order to the right Administration of Justice, by the unquestionable Authority of such Legal Magistrates, as we are bound to submit to, not only for Wrath, but *Conscience* sake. I shall therefore within as little a Compass, as the Copiousness of this large Point, and the small portion of time allow'd me will permit, endeavour,

I. First, To enquire into the true Nature, and the just Bounds, and Measures of *Conscience*.

II. Secondly, To propose some Considerations, whereby a false and erroneous *Conscience* may be distinguish'd from a sincere and true One.

III. Thirdly,

The Nature, Obligation, and Measures of Conscience. §

III. Thirdly, To lay down those General Laws, whereby the *Conscience* is to be Regulated, and shew how they ought to be Apply'd.

I. And First, I will enquire into the true Nature, and the just Bounds, and Measures of *Conscience*. And this I shall do, First, from Scripture, and, Secondly, from Reason.

Some of the School-men, as well as others, of the Ancient, and Modern Writers of Casuistical Divinity, in their Speculations on this Subject, have not undeservedly, been Tax'd for darkning it with so many unnecessary frivolous, and intricate Notions, that they seem rather to have endeavour'd to confound, and perplex Mens Minds, with impertinent Doubts and Difficulties, than to propose such Remedies, as might effectually solve their Scruples and Fears. Tho' the Scripture is so very clear and plain in this Matter, that from the frequent Use and Energy of this Word, *Conscience*, therein, it will be found to carry this General Import in it, namely, *The Knowledge of a Natural, or Divine Law, join'd with an Application of it, to some particular Instance of Practice, to which it is adequately suited, and adapted.* Out of the many Places that occur in the *New Testament*, to establish this Notion of *Conscience*, it may be sufficient to quote one or two, which give in the Sense of the rest. *St. Paul*, in his *Epistle to the Romans*, Chap. 2. v. 14, 15, 16, speaking of the *Gentiles*, who had no other Guide of their Actions, but the Law of Nature, or Reason rightly inform'd, expressly declares, that this was to them, *the Rule of their Conscience*, whereby they were to be Judg'd at the last Day, and Acquitted or Condemn'd. For (says he) *when the Gentiles which have not the Law, (that is the Mosaic or Reveal'd Law) do by Nature the things contain'd in the Law, these being not the Law, are a Law unto themselves; which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their Conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while Accusing, or else Excusing one another, in the Day when God shall judge the Secrets of Men, by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel.* In the same Chapter, v. 12. Discoursing concerning the State of the *Jews*, who had the Lively Oracles of God's written Word, and the Law of *Moses* superinduc'd upon the Law of Reason, to illustrate and enlarge it, says, *as many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judg'd by the Law*, which extends the Obligation of *Conscience*, with regard to them, from the Law of Nature to that of a further Reveal'd, Positive Law. But in his *Epistle to Titus*, chap. 1. v. 15. the Apostle speaking concerning the State of Christianity, that had the Supreme Privilege of an entire Revelation of the Divine Law, he says, of Errors in Judgment and Practice, *Unto the Pure are all things Pure, but unto them that are Defil'd and unbelieving, is nothing Pure, but even their Mind and Conscience is Defil'd*, where we find *us*; *Mind* added to *conscience* is *Conscience*, to explain and adjust its Meaning, denoting the Intellectual Faculty of the Soul, judging upon any Moral Point, together with an Application of it to Practice. So that here is a Complex and Relative Idea, carrying a double Notion in it of *Conscience*, which with respect to its Operation, is also Twofold. First, Relating to what is pass'd, judging it self to have either done Well, or Ill; or Secondly, Relating to its present Duty, advising and directing us, in the Necessity, Legality, or Illegality of any thing, that ought to be done, or not done by us. Which Division results from the two Faculties, or rather Reflect Actions of the Soul, in Contemplating and Judging what is present, or in Deliberating on what is pass'd, either Justifying and Acquitting, or Accusing and Condemning us before God and our *Conscience*. Under one of these two Notions, most Places in the *New Testament*, and those that may seem to correspond to them in the *Old*, are understood.

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This is the short and general Account that *Revelation* has given us of this Matter; and it would have been well, if Men had rested here, and been contented with the plain and easie Determinations of the Scriptures; which had left no room for Doubts and Ambiguities, and had prevented all those Sophistical Subtleties, which have been Invented by Men of Jesuitical, and Fanatical Brains; who have Refin'd the express Rules of Human Duty into Whimsical and Inexplicable Theories; have clogg'd and surrounded it with useless and surprizing Questions, Spinoſe Obſtacles, and abſtruſe Diſtinctions, laid in the Dark, as ſo many Myſtical Snares, and Spiritual Gins to catch Men's Conſciences, and plunge 'em into the unfathomable Abyſs of God's Preſcience, Decrees, and Predeſtination; Things which the Thoughts of Men, which are not as God's Thoughts, can never Fix or Determine. Theſe Legerdemain Craftsmen in Divinity, who thus handle the Word of God deceitfully, ought juſtly to Inherit the Woes denounc'd by God, (*Ezekiel, chap. 13.*) againſt their brethren, the falſe Prophets, *Who Daw'd with untemper'd Mortar, prophesied out of their own Hearts, follow'd their own Spirit, ſaw Vanity and Deceitful Lyes, ſeducing the People. Will ye pollute Me (ſays God) among my People, for handfuls of Barley and for pieces of Bread, to ſlay the ſouls that ſhould not dye, and to ſave the ſouls alive that ſhould not live by your Lying to my people that hear your Lyes? Wherefore thus ſaith the Lord God, Behold I am againſt your Pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the Souls to make 'em fly, and I will tear them from your Arms, and will let the Souls go, even the Souls that ye hunt to make 'em fly. Be- cauſe with Lyes ye have made the Heart of the Righteous ſad, whom I have not made ſad, and ſtrengthen'd the hands of the Wicked, that he ſhould not return from his wicked way by promiſing him Life.* How Applicable is this Character to thoſe Men, who inſtead of ſervin' the Great Purpoſes of Morality, and Religion, which ought to be represented as easie and practicable, as 'tis Inviting and Agreeable (which certainly raiſes both the Dignity and Excellency of the Law, and ſupream Legiſlature,) when they ſhould have helpt the Lam and Blind, out of the Pit they were faln into, and aſſiſted the Infirmities, and Neceſſities of the Weak, and Impotent, Intangle 'em deeper in the Mire, enhancing their Miſeries, exaggerating their Guilt, frightening 'em with falſe Apprehenſions, and Imaginary Scruples, and in a word, raiſing that Devil, which they were never able again ſufficiently to lay. Theſe are doubtleſs faithful Paſtors, and Stewards of God's holy Myſteries, who feed his Servants with Stones inſtead of Bread, and in lieu of a whoſom and heavenly Repaſt of his Word, ſet before 'em, noiſome Serpents, and deadly Scorpions!

But to proceed, Let us ſee how far the Plain Principles of Reason and Argumentation, will carry us in the Diſcovery of the true Nature of this Point. Upon a Survey of it, we ſhall find, that all the Modes, or Affections, of either the Mind, or Conſcience, which are only ſo many different States, or Degrees of its Operation, will be comprehended under theſe Four, Namely,

1. *A Clear, Upright, and well-Inſtructed Conſcience.*
2. *A Probable Conſcience.*
3. *A Doubtful, or Scrupulous Conſcience.*
4. *An Erroneous Conſcience.*

Theſe Four ſorts of Conſciences, take their Riſe from, and are Grounded upon the different Evidence of any Practical Evidence of any Practical Object, propos'd to the Mind, and the Clearneſs, and Diſtinction, or the Obſcurity, and Confuſion, of the Ideas that it Frames thereof.

1. If the matter it Deliberates upon, be a Thing in its Nature, Plain, and Intelligible, not incumber'd with Difficulties and Doubts, and ſuch as appears either neceſſary, or lawful to be done, and conſequently a Duty; or Illegal, and

and necessary to be Abstain'd from, and consequently a Sin; as on the one hand prohibited, or on the other injoin'd, by Divine, Human, or Moral Laws; and a Man acts accordingly in all these Cases, with a full persuasion of Mind, and the assent of his Conscience, guiding and governing it self by such Rules as are adequate, and suited to its several Actions; such a Person certainly goes upon the Principles of a sincere, upright, and truly intrusted Conscience.

2. But, secondly, If the Matter propos'd to the Mind, has not this Clearness, and Evidence in it self, either through the Intricacies, it may be involv'd in by its Nature, or the obscurity, and ambiguity of its Circumstances, or the want of a full and exact Distinction in the Law, prohibiting, or injoyning: The Understanding having fully weigh'd the Doubts and Objections on all sides, and ballanc'd the Matter with all the Justice and Equity that it can; and finding the Reasons on the one hand preponderating those on the other: Upon such an Impartial Survey, and Scrutiny, the Conscience determining on the Probable Part, proceeds according to its Judgment, and acts upon the decision of Argument and Colour, not apprehending any apparent Evil, express Illegality, or inexpediency in its Action. This is the Probable Conscience, and will justify where all proper Means are us'd for its Instruction.

3. But thirdly, If the Mind upon a Survey of all Sides, finds it self poised in an *Equilibrium* betwixt both; if the Reasons appear equally clear, strong and convincing on either side, and it knows not how to Judge, or determine its Election, and the Law relating to this Matter, may be either dubious, equivocal, indifferent, or perhaps silent: If the Conscience hangs thus under a State of Neutrality, and as 'twere declines and suspends its Consent, and yet the Person act without it, this is a Doubting Conscience, and the Man under its Conduct is Guilty of Sin, if he does so. But if it does Assent, his Action is so far justifiable, as it appears not offending against any Positive, and plain Prohibition or Law. For the *Negative* being of infinite Extent, and Latitude, makes great and just Room for Allowances, in these dubious Cases. But if the Conscience apprehends, or suspects, any Evil (tho' perhaps False) in the Matter of its Action, otherwise in it self Legal, which is the Case of a scrupulous Conscience, it is under an Obligation of Not-acting, because no Action is justifiable, that is against, or without the consent of the Mind.

4. But, lastly, if the Mind is not rightly instructed, or inform'd, as to the Matter of its Action, and frames a wrong Judgment of its Legality, or Illegality, from a false, or confus'd Apprehension of, or Ignorance in, the Law, and Nature of the Action, or is distorted, or misled, by Passion, Prejudice, Interest, Pride, Lust, or any other sinister Means, this is an Erroneous Conscience, bringing always Guilt upon the Actor, and involv'ing him in Sin, according to that receiv'd Maxim, That, *the Ignorance of the Law can never Excuse a Delinquent.*

Now the first of these Consciences proceeds upon either Faith, or Demonstration, the Infallible Revelation of God, or the certain Measures of Reason.

The Second proceeds upon the Grounds of Probable, or Moral Certainty, a Rational Belief, Perswasion, or Opinion.

The Third cannot proceed but according to the Degrees of Assent, or Election, and

The Fourth proceeds upon Ignorance or Error.

This I hope may seem to be no obscure or indistinct account of the Nature of Conscience, as taking in all its Properties, consider'd under the Principles of Reason, and the gradual Light, and different Advance-

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ments, that it makes under its Conduct; and I presume, this may be the most Natural and Just way of Explaining it, and which clears off all those abstruse Perplexities, other Mystical Interpretations bring upon it. For certainly every Man's Conscience, either is, or ought to be Govern'd by Rational Motives, which are the supream Commands of the Understanding on its Subjects, the Will, and Affections, never to be disputed, never to be disobey'd without Rebellion against their spiritual Sovereign.

This being premis'd, as a rational View of the Nature and Obligation of Conscience in general, and its several Parts, Modes, or Habitudes in particular, I come in the next place,

II. *Secondly*, To propose some Considerations, whereby a false, and erroneous Conscience, may be distinguish'd from a sincere, and true One. What has bin before remark'd, in settling the distinct Bounds of Each, might be in it self, sufficient to discover the Difference; but perhaps it will appear much more evident to those, who for want of Time, or Skill, at first view cannot fully comprehend these Abstracted Notions, and follow the Mind thorough all the Dark Labyrinth of its secret Operations, if we proceed more fully to display, in their proper Colours, all those False Pretences that are so apt to Delude and put upon our Judgments, and deceive us with empty Shadows, and visionary Appearances of Religion. Among all which there is none, that with so much Artifice and Illusion, Palms the insnaring Imposture upon our credulous Faith, as the plausible Disguise of Interest. This will so fatally over-rule the Conscience, so warp its Judgment, and blind its discerning Faculties, that in time, it will intirely depose it from its Dominion, and usurp its Place and Authority: so that *tho' it has Eyes, they shall not see; tho' it has Ears, it shall not hear; tho' it has Understanding, it shall not understand.* In this case a Man forfeits the exalted Priviledge of his Reason, and degrades it to the base Servitude of his Passions; he argues, not from his Understanding, but his Flesh and Blood; and how weak the demonstrative Force of a Syllogism is, in opposition to the more powerful Fallacy of our Appetites, Experience is sufficient to convince us. For, is not this Interest the Great *Diana* of the World, to whose Silver Shrine its Religious Votaries pay the most devout Homage, and implicit Adoration? What is there that the exorbitant Power of this cannot effect, when it shall teach a Man to Renounce his Senses, caress Fraud, adore Nonsense, abandon his Creed, and give the Lye to the holy Spirit of God within them? When Duty and Interest clash and interfere, how Purblind does it render our Judgments? how difficult is it to view the Difference? how many artificial Quirks, Subterfuges, and Equivocations, are immediately found out, to keep the Peace 'em? Such shrew'd Sophisters are never at a Loss for saving Distinctions, *To Keep what they have, and Get what they can*: This being the Grand Maxim, which the Wise Men of this World lay down as the Foundation of all their Politicks; whereby they are so easily brought to comply, and fall in with such Principles and Practices, as are most likely to promote it. It is the Melancholly Amusement only of *Men of Letters and Philosophy*, to live and feed upon Ideas, and dispute about Imaginary Felicity: Those who contemplate *Naked Truth, and Vertue without Reward*, are likely to get nothing elie for their Labour; but must expect to be as Contemptible, and Destitute, as Truth and Vertue usually are. But the *Children of this World* are taught to be *Wiser in their Generation than the Children of Light*; they trouble not them-

themselves with the Merit of their Cause, or Party; they are not fetter'd, or confin'd, with the little, stiff-lac'd Notions of rigid Justice and Honesty; they are for a Latitude, both of Thought, and Action, a Licentious Immunity from all Legal Restraint; which, with their *Peculiar Talents of Impudence and Falshood*, they stick not to call *Liberty of Conscience*, and presume to Challenge, as *That Freedom of Will*, which, they say, is the *universal Privilege of Mankind*. As if *That Liberty of Conscience*, which the Government has indulg'd to such Persons alone, whose real Scruples will not permit them to join in the Establish'd Communion, could ever be intended to shelter such, as have not the least Pretence to the very Name of Conscience; or to impower *Deists, Scepticists, and Atheists*, to revile, ridicule, and blaspheme our most holy Faith and Church, at their pleasure, with Impunity. Thus Villanously are our Laws abus'd, and this Sacred Name play'd upon, to the foul dishonour of God, and the disgrace of Religion; which now a-days is made the *Pharisaical and Puritan Cloak*, like *Samuel's Mantle*, to amuse the Witch, and cover the Devil, and consecrate all Infidelity, Injustice, Pride, Lust, Avarice, and Ambition, and the most execrable Vices of Hell, with the holy Title of Conscience; which, in sad Truth, is nothing else, but the Vizard-Mask of Couzenage, Knavery, and Hypocrisy; it is the spiritual Tool to serve the Turn of all wicked Designs, meer Party-Cant, and Fanatical Jargon, the very Sound whereof shou'd be a Warning-Piece to alarm every honest Man to stand upon his Guard, and Look about him.

Whatever Pretences these Time-serving Men may gild their crafty Stratagems with, it will be found at last, that they are nothing but downright Political *Atheists*; For they are really Indifferent to every Sect, or Religion; espouse neither, but as it suits with their Advantage; and, as That changes, are ready still to obey its Motions, shift with the Scene, swim with the Tide, and veer to every Point of the Compass, as the Wind that serves 'em, commands. They are dissonant in their Opinions and Practices, as those are inconsistent with the Laws of God; and, in a word, on every Occasional prospect of Gain, are their own Reverse, and one continued Practical-Self-Contradiction. To verify this Infamous, and most abominable Character, which 'tis a shame shou'd be found in any Nation professing the name of *Christian*, have we not, to the Disappointment of both our Laws, Civil and Ecclesiastical, a Set of Miscreants suffer'd amongst us, and those even pretending to more Sanctity and Conscience, than the rest of Mankind, who not only are openly open, and practice, but even presume to justify this Amphibious Conformity; who to qualify themselves for a poultry Place, can slyly creep to those Altars they proclaim Idolatrous, join in a Communion they revile as superstitious, and swallow that Sacrament, which at other times they refuse, as Damnation. And, indeed, in this tremendous Case, it ought to be the Wish of every charitable Christian, that they may not, in such a solemn and deliberate Act of the worst of Hypocrisy, *Eat and Drink their own Damnation, not discerning the Lord's Body*. Such Men, like *Esau*, that Reprobate of God, wou'd doubtless Barter their spiritual Birthright for a Mess of Pottage; like *Gehazi* they will impudently Lye, (and not have so much Shame as he had to disown it) for *Changes of Raiment, and Talents of Silver*; they inherit *Naaman's Crime*, more odious and thinking than his Leprosy; who, to keep his Post in the Government, could bow down in the House of Rimmon, and yet acknowledge the God of Israel;

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in a word, They out-do that amazing and Irremissible Sin, of the Son of Perdition, the Arch-Traytor *Judas* himself, in that, they daily sell and betray their *Lord and Saviour* for Money. And wou'd not (think ye) the *Primitive Church* have thunder'd out its *Anathema's*, against such Daring and Insolent Offenders ? Wou'd it not have spew'd these Vipers out of her Communion, whose crying Sins call aloud to Heaven, for that just Vengeance, they have not yet found upon Earth ?

Thus Fatally can the Dominion of Interest sway Mens Faith and Practice, and suborn both, to the *Mammon* of Unrighteousness. For a Man to quit his Temporal Honours, and Estate in this Life, for another in Reversion in the next, is such an uneasy exchange of Title, that our Blessed Saviour himself cou'd not (humanly speaking) perswade the Rich Man in the Gospel, to comply with, tho' we are told, he was no ordinary Proficient in Piety. And where Interest and Religion come to stand in Competition, there are not few who would follow his Example, and turn their Backs upon their Saviour. Insomuch, that the Devil thought himself secure of betraying the very Son of God, when he gave him the pompous View, and alluring Promise of this World. Which really are Temptations, that induce Good, as well great Men, sometimes to fall down and Worship, and which require no small pinch of Vertue and Resolution, to baffle and withstand. This is the tenderest part of Nature, and no wonder if it sometimes gives way, when 'tis assaulted on the weakest side. How often have we seen, when a shining Preferment has dazzl'd and warm'd the Conscience of some Ambitious, or Indigent Persons, how wonderfully it has soften'd and relax'd their rigid Principles, and suddenly, and almost as effectually wrought a Conversion in their Opinions, as the Light that from Heaven struck down *St. Paul* ? It requires indeed a full Conviction of the infallible Truth of our Principles, and the Merit of our Cause, and a staunch Resolution, rais'd upon the serious Deliberation of both, with a lively Sense of our Obligations to, and an awful Fear of God's Justice, to keep Men stedfast unmoveable, and inflexibly persevering in their Religious Sentiments. Yet notwithstanding the Difficulty, it will be still found to be as much our true Interest, as really Duty, upon which a good Conscience always keeps its Eye fixt and unwavering, and is like the God that it serves, without variableness, or shadow of change. It consults its Innocence, nor its security, follows Christ to the Cross, as well as to the Crown, and is as ready to suffer for, as to Reign with him. It maintains a constant and uniform Course of Integrity, never deviating from it self, and the plain Road of Truth and Honesty. It knows no Latitude, commensurable Shifts, or Doubles in its Principles, but is, as the Object of its Worship, the same to day, to morrow, and for ever.

2. The Second thing that Deceives us under the Pretence of Conscience is Prejudice *. This is an Infant Principle, that takes Root deep in the Man, and spread large in the Understanding ; like the Mustard-seed in the Gospel, that from a slender and Minute Grain, shoots up, and enlarges into the Boughs, and Branches of a Tree. From a little and insensible Beginning, it rises up to a firm, strong, and irradicable Habit in the Soul, and being joyn'd with Pride, Obstinacy, and Self-Love, is made almost inseperable from it. From hence 'tis that so great a part of the World, owe those few Notions of Conscience and Religion, that they have, either to the Fashions and Customs,

* This Subject I've treated on at large in another Discourse.

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of the Country they are born in, or to the Methods and Ways of Education, in which they are bred: nay, some to the Callings and Professions in which they are accidentally train'd up, not a few to the Conversation, and Company that they keep: others to the Authority of such Persons as they Confide in, and others to their own Constitution, Singularity, and Condition. And how hardly are Men brought to search Impartiality into the Truth, and Foundation of their Opinions; and therefore much more, to relinquish those Principles which they have cherish'd as the Rules of their Conduct, and darling Friends so long? They had rather believe with an Implicit Faith, take their *Creed* by Report, and venture its Consequence, than be at the trouble and uneasiness of canvassing its Articles. Thus Error being first entertain'd, pleads Prescription against Truth, and enjoying a long prepossession in the Mind, usurps its Place, and excludes its Entrance, stops up the Passage of Reason, and the Avenues of Conviction; it ingrosses the Intellectual Man, makes him Peevish, and Sour, Perverse, and Resistive, and Incapacitates him for Reformation. And no wonder, when his Judgment is thus basely Brib'd, and Retain'd, that it gives him wrong Counsel; and like a deceitful Lawyer, betrays that Cause it ought to defend. A Man may therefore, in this Case, have a full Acquiescence in his false Sentiments, and esteem his Conscience sincere and true, while he is insensible, that it is grounded on an Error, because the Mistake is early imbib'd, and has been long receiv'd. And that which makes this Matter, of so perilous a Consequence, is, that it may insinuate itself into our Fundamental Articles, vitiate and diminish our Faith, and thereby endanger our Eternal Salvation. For it is a Truth (tho' seemingly severe) that can never too often be Inculcated, that an Erroneous Persuasion is as Damnable, as an Immoral Life; it being almost inconceivable, that the Cause and Effect shou'd not correspond, that a *Bad Tree should bring forth good Fruit*, or a Man believe Ill, and at the same time live Well. So that there's no Question, but that any one may really think his Conscience upright, and unbiass'd, when 'tis govern'd by these Prejudices; and tho' he acts in Conformity to them, find himself after his Death, in a gross Mistake in the other World, and Recant when 'tis too late. For, God having laid before us his Law, in the most obvious and intelligible Terms, with a Command to Try, Examine Direct, and Judge our Consciences by that Rule, has left us without Excuse, for not so doing, and may justly inflict an Eternal Punishment for our Neglect in this Matter. Neither will here the pretence of a good Intention any ways mitigate the Crime, annul the Guilt, or indemnify the Offender, unless only in Cases of invincible Ignorance. Such a dangerous Misfortune is it, to be set wrong at first, and season'd with corrupt Principles, which may in time gain an absolute and uncontrollable Dominion in the Soul, derive a fatal and inevitable Propension upon the whole Conscience, which may debauch the true Faith, and subvert the very Foundations of Justice and Piety. How high-flown and liable to error, this Doctrine may seem to the Reflections of some Latitudinarian Divines, who place Morality above Faith, and who wou'd be thought to imitate the Example, without believing in, or trusting to the Merits, and Satisfaction of their Redeemer; it is undeniably evident, from the express Words of the Gospel, that the *Jews*, who crucify'd the *Messiah*, and persecuted him after his Death, in his Apostles, thought themselves bound in Conscience, to commit these execrable Sins; and that they did God good Service thereby. Whereas those very Apostles

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always charge 'em with these heinous Crimes, as unpardonable, without Repentance: for that this erroneous Judgment, tho' proceeding from Ignorance, was sufficient to consign 'em over to everlasting Damnation, unless Christ interceded for 'em at the Right Hand of God, as he did upon the Cross, *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

3. The Third Instance, that may cheat us under the Appearance of true Conscience, is Passion. This imposes upon us in a thousand Shapes, and requires great Sagacity to discover it. It were not difficult to dilate on this copious Subject, and shew at large, how the various Representations of Good and Evil, and those painted Scenes of Pleasure and Pain, which they so lively describ in the Imagination, work up those several Sensations and Ideas in the Mind, which are as 'were the Internal Springs, and Wheels, and that secret kind of Mechanism, that sets the whole Man a going. Whoever looks into his own Breast, cannot but be Conscious, how from his Admiration and Desire, his Love and Hatred, his Joy and Sorrow, his Anger and Pity, his Hope and Fear, his Jealousie and Despair, his Shame and Honour, his Envy or Disdain, &c. all his Actions, according to their different Objects are produc'd and regulat'd. These are the Cords of a Man, (as the Prophet *Hosea* Figuratively expresses it) whereby he is vehemently drawn and seduc'd, oftentimes against his Reason, by the powerful Force of his Inclination and Affection: Which as 'tis variously Predominant in Men, Witches and Distorts the Conscience into the same irregular Figure. Fear, the strongest and most violent of the Passions, when once deeply seated in the Soul, Tyrannizes over it in a very insolent and imperious manner; raising up mean and unworthy Thoughts in it, and degrading it to all the Servile, and pitiful Compliances in the World. Those crude unmanly Notions of Religion, which it produces in some Persons, may be look'd upon rather as a Melancholly Indisposition in the Blood, than a Disaffection in the Understanding, which doubtless does in a great measure follow, and obey the Constitution of the Body. Under such a spleenatick Complexion, the Mind cannot act brisk and sprightly upon its Organs, and Judge, and Reason perspicuously as it ought to do. On the other Hand, Self-sufficiency, Pride, and a bitter Zeal make Men Supercilious, Cruel, Aspiring, and Presuming; Arrogant in themselves, Insolent to their Neighbours, and even impudently Familiar, and Sawcy towards God. Now the Motions of these Passions being so very turbulent and rapid, they silence and drown the still Voice of Reason, allow it not time to recollect it self, but hurry it away blindfold into Sin. Every other Passion has its particular Charm to intoxicate, and way of Operation to deceive the Understanding, that it may not distinguish betwixt specious Sophistry, and the true Commands and Laws of an unbiass'd and uncorrupted Conscience.

4. To this of Passion may be added another Cause of Error in the Conscience, not much unlike it in Nature, and that is, Humour, or Phancy, which is the sensual Operation of a Whimsical and Deprav'd Will, which inclines Men through a Sceptical Disposition, to hunt after Novelties, fall in Love with odd Hypotheses and Conjectures, catch at Phantoms, and at length so far deceive themselves, as to credit their own Dreams and Reveries. A sort of Magick Enchantment in the Understanding, a Romantick Scene of Life, made up of Air and Invention, in which Men walk as 'twere in their Sleep, and converse in a Vision: It usually possesses Men of strong Imaginations, and weak Judgments, and so insatuates the Reason, that it deprives it of the Power of distinguishing betwixt Caprice and Religion, betwixt the Spiritu-

al and Natural Inclinations, or the Motions of the Superior and Inferior Soul. This may spring perhaps from the irregular Heats of a too Volatile and disturb'd Brain, which may put the Spirits into a confus'd Ferment, a Precipitate and Violent Career, and thereby give the lower Principles of Sensation a Predominancy over the Powers of right Reason. This (as a learned Writer with a curious Felicity of Expression, styles it) may be call'd an Animal Conscience, arising from, and being govern'd by the Imagination, and bearing the same Relation to the sensitive Representations of it, as the true Conscience does to the Intellectual Faculties and Operations: A most unhappy and almost incurable Delusion, which God permits some Willful, Self-conceited, and Headstrong Persons to fall into; whose Pride, and Ignorance, sets 'em above the wholsom Doctrines, and wise Ordinances of the Church, and perswades 'em to prefer their own vain and sottish Inventions, before the Eternal Oracles of Truth, and the unerring Light of Divine Revelation. Whereupon the Holy Ghost has thought fit to Caution all sober Christians, against the Madness of such Frantick Zealots, by stigmatizing 'em with that Just, but Vile Character, of being deserted by his blessed Influence, given up to their own Inclinations, to strong Delusions, and to the Belief of a Lye: As it is frequently observ'd of Men much Addicted to such obstinate Humours, from a long habitual Indulgence in 'em, they come at last to impose more upon themselves than others; and which is the most wretched and despicable Condition, a Mortal can fall under. to swallow their own Falshoods, and believe their own Fictions. To this Wild and Enthusiastick Infatuation, we ought to appropriate the Rise of Heresie, (which on this very account, is doubtless, by *St. Paul*, reckon'd among the Works of the Flesh, tho' it seems to be an Intellectual Operation) together with Bigotry and Phanaticism, which some Fanciful, Wayward, and Contumacious Men create in their Brains, and Blasphemously Christen with the Holy Name of the Spirit and Conscience. Which in truth are nothing but Phrenzy, and the Lunatick Productions of distemper'd Heads: And what are the Fatal Effects of these Mischievous, and Diabolical Intoxications, if not kept under a timely Government and Restraint, scarce any Kingdom in *Europe*, but can sadly testify, and our own in particular, even to this Day, may lament, and for the future Deprecate.

5 The last Instance, I produce of a mistaken Conscience in the World, is what it calls Honour; which, since Religion is grown out of Fashion, is now become the Gentleman's Conscience. Christianity forsooth, must be discarded by some Men of Honour, as a narrow Institution, fit only for Bookish Pedants, that are unacquainted with the way of the World: Their Reason must be as loose, and unconfin'd as their Lives: and they scorn tamely to submit to an Incredible and Mysterious Revelation, which to their refin'd Understanding is meer Nonsense, and Priest-craft; if through an high Strain of Complaisance, they condescend to own any Natural or Moral Duty, 'tis well if they mean any thing by it, besides the fulfilling their Lusts and Pleasures: As if they were born for nothing else but Ease and Luxury, and the World was made for these useless *Leviathans* to take their Pastime therein: Fortune, Quality and Condition, it seems are sufficient Privileges to give their Possessors a Dispensation from the Power and Obligation of Laws, and to Exempt these Favourites of Heaven (as they deem themselves) from all their Penalties, by a peculiar Prerogative above their Fellow Creatures: As if, by how much the greater Bounty, God has bestow'd upon them, so much the less Gratitude they ow'd to him, and their

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Acknowledgments were still to be lessen'd by the increase of his Favours. These are the Persons, who, by their own Authority, wou'd supersede the Law of God, and make themselves, and their own licentious Wills, the sole Guide and Rule of their Actions; which, in their Dialect, they are pleas'd to varnish with the Glittering Colour of Honour; a thing, which these Empty and Noisy Pretenders to, talk as loudly and confidently about, as if they really understood what it meant. Whereas (God knows) they want as much to be instructed in the true Nature of this, as in that Religion, which they so ignorantly laugh at, and so presumptuously despise. Otherwise they wou'd not, in defiance of the Wisdom of all Laws, Human and Divine, set up a senseless Notion of Bravery, to dignifie Malice and Murder; and take that to be the only Satisfaction of the Gentleman, which must be the Damnation of the Christian. In short, where Men abandon their Faith, and the Fear of God, Conscience, and Honour, are insignificant Sounds, and deceitful Expressions, which Men that have neither, make use of to impose upon those that have. There are doubtless many Men, who abstain from the Commission of some impious and detestable Actions, purely with respect to common Decency, a Sense of Generosity, or the Rules of good Breeding, without any regard had to those of Religion, or the Commands of God. That is, to speak the plain Truth, they scorn to be guilty of any thing that may render 'em little, and Contemtable in the Esteem of Men of Worth and Gravity; so that indeed it is their Character, not Integrity, the Reputation and Applause of Men, not the Answer of a good Conscience, that Governs their Conduct. How little are these Gentlemen acquainted with the sound Notion of true Honour, which is a much more Exalted Principle than they take it for, and Springs from a more Noble and Beautiful Original? This is not the Degenerate Off-spring of Sin, or Villainy, does not arise from any Vicious Qualities, as Pride, Hypocrisie, Ostentation, Revenge, or Ambition; but is founded upon the real Worth, and intrinsic Goodness of Things; Springs from God, and the Law, the sole Fountains of Honour, to whose Precepts and Injunctions, it always pays a just Subordination, and final Reference. This indeed is not so much a single Vertue in it self, as the Seasoning Qualification and Embellishment of all other Vertues; which (to draw a Compendious Description of its lovely Properties) *Sets a Man above all Fear, but that of doing anything Base or Dishonest; which makes him abhor, or as much to detest from his Enemy, as to flatter his Friend; to scorn Hypocrisie, tho' 'twere for his Interest; and detest Injustice, tho' it might gratify his Revenge; which renders him Dutiful and Submissive to his Superiors, Affable, Obliging, and Generous even to his Inferiors; and in a Word, that makes him, on all Occasions, Exemplify his steady Loyalty to his Prince, his inviolable Love to his Country, his untainted Fidelity to his Friend, his open Hospitality to Strangers, his Perpetual Charity to the Poor and his Universal Beneficence to all the World.* This is that charming Character, which alone constitutes a Man of true Honour, who certainly is the best Man in the World, next to a Man of Conscience, who still rises higher in his Principles, and makes God and his Duty the sole, and ultimate End of all his Actions.

Thus I have run through all those Causes, which I take to be the Grounds of an Erroneous and Misguided Conscience; all which I have drawn from the Nature and Motives of Human Actions, which is resolving them into their Principles, and (as I humbly conceive) the best and truest way of explaining them. Such as are Interest and Prejudice, the Delusions of our several Passions and Affections, Superstition, Pride, Fear, Ignorance, and mistaken Zeal, Imagination and Fancy, Reputation and false Honour: All which are wrong Grounds of Practice, and can never properly justify our Conduct. We see how many ways there are that lead to Error; for that single one that directs us safely, and infallibly to Truth, and how liable we are to be betray'd into any, or all of them. And methinks the dangerous Consequence might forewarn us to beware of taking up false Principles at first; for if these are founded on an Unsound and Treacherous Bottom, the whole Course of our Lives being grounded upon Sin and Error, must needs be one continued Mistake, and so insensibly carry us on to, and at length end in Ruine and Confusion. So bewitching is the Imposture, we may be seduc'd into it, and not know what we are doing: *There being a way (as the Wise Man tells us) that may seem right in a Man's own Eyes, when nevertheless the end of that way is Death.* And without doubt in this lamentable Case, a Man may govern the whole Course, and Tenour of his Life and Actions by a Rule, that may through Prejudice, or a want of due Examination appear Just, and true in his own Judgment, and notwithstanding find himself judg'd of God, by a quite contrary one at the last Day. This is the vast and frightful danger of founding our Conscience, upon wrong Principles in the beginning, which is the great and most common Occasion of Error; but there is another, which tho' not so frequent, is however no less Perilous a Consequence, and that is a false Application of right Principles. In this Case, a Man sets out well for his Journey, but for want of a Guide, or Conduct, mistakes his Road, wanders up and down, is at length bewilder'd and lost, and so falls short of the design'd happy End of his Travels. Of such infinite Concern and Importance is it, if we wou'd avoid these dismal Miscarriages, to make our selves thoroughly acquainted with the Nature and Obligation of the exact Rule of our Actions, and the proper use that we shou'd make of it in the Application, which brings me in the last Place.

III. Thirdly,

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III. *Thirdly*, To state those general Laws, whereby the *Conscience* is to be regulated, and to shew how they ought to be apply'd. Now the whole Extent, and Obligation of *Conscience*, tho' seemingly so very Copious, is bounded by these Three Laws.

1. *The Divine,*
2. *The Political, and*
3. *The Moral Law.*

1. The *First*, being the Immediate Command of *God*, is the Great, Supream, and Transcendent Law of all, wherein is sum'd up in a Full and Comprehensive View, of our *Christian Duty*, and the Will of *God*, entirely reveal'd to the World.

2. The *Second* is the Law of all Civil Societies, by which are to be Try'd all Actions, relating to Government, and whatsoever is committed betwixt *Man and Man*; which in Subordination to the *First*, and if not Contrary to it, lays great Force and Indispensible Obligation of Duty upon every Subject, this Obligation being Ratify'd by the *Divine Law*.

3. The *Last* is that *Law*, whereby we are to Try the *Good or Evil* of our *Actions*, as they stand related to *Vertue or Vice*, and are founded upon the *Principles of Reason*, and the *Light of Nature*. The other two *Laws* are Superstructures upon this *Law*, which being the dictate of Nature, written by *God in our Hearts*, was, and is the Rule of our Actions, when ever the Other two *Laws* are Silent.

By the Conformity of our Actions to these three *Laws*, as those Actions lie under their peculiar Jurisdiction and Cognisance, we are to take the Measures of their Rectitude, or Obliquity, and denominate them Good, or Bad, Vertuous, or Vicious: and a Man's *Conscience* may always Acquit him, where it does not appear Obnoxious to one of these *Laws*; according to that Eternal Maxim of the Scriptures, *Where there is no Law, there is no Transgression*: Now tho' the Holy Scriptures are the grand, sovereign Law of all, so that nothing can be authorized in any Inferior Law, that is any ways Repugnant, or contrary to that, yet it must be acknowledg'd, not to be, *the Universal, Adequate Rule of conscience*: neither must we expect every thing to be commanded therein, which may be the Injunction of particular *Laws*; for this wou'd Superse'de, and Frustrate their End; neither is there any absolute Necessity, of Justifying any peculiar Law with Authority drawn from the Scriptures, unless as it is expressly prohibited; or by manifest, and undeniable Deductions, concluded from thence to be Unlawful.

That these *Laws*, take in the whole compass of Humane Duty, is evident, in that they answer to the Three great Branches, or distinct Offices of it, relating to *God*, our Neighbour, and our Selves. The *first*, shewing what we Owe to our Creator, as Men, and *Christians*; The *second*, what we Owe to our Brethren, as Members of the Body Politick, in our Publick Capacities; and the *third*, what we owe to our Selves, in our Private Capacity; as far as it is discoverable by the Principles of Revelation, the Rules of Civil Justice, the *Light of Nature*, and the dictates of Reason.

Thus I have given as short, and I hope as clear a view of this Momentous Point, as the time wou'd allow me, and to close up the whole, shall further intreat your Patience, whilst I briefly shew, how those Rules may be apply'd:

1. To Settle a *Doubtful*,
2. To Quiet a *Scrupulous*, and
3. To Correct an *Erroneous Conscience*.

1. And *first*, to Settle a *Doubtful Conscience*. In order to which, this Maxim is to be served, That the Commands of our *Conscience* should be always Regarded, but the Prohibitions must be strictly Obey'd. For we ought as much to abstain from Doing any thing, that is but Probably Lawful, as from Doing what may be Possibly Unlawful; because the Mind must Act by its Light, Will, and Consent. And there is great hazard lying on That Side; whereas upon the Other, a Man may be satisfy'd in what he does, and runs no great Venture, at least falls into no Sin, if in the Matter of Debate, he has us'd all Just, and Requisite Endeavours, to satisfy himself about what shou'd possibly prove Unlawful. Doubt always implies a Thought of Injustice, and therefore the Holy Ghost guards against it, with the most positive, and peremptory Threat of Hell and Damnation: *He that Doubteth* (says he) *is Damn'd if he Eat, for what ever is not of Faith, is Sin*, Rom. 14. 23. But in case of Necessity, where two Things are propos'd to us to be done, and the Mind hangs in Suspence as to the Apprehension of Evil, certainly it must place its Election where there is the least Danger; for here the Less Evil puts on the Nature of Good: but where the Choice is Free to Act, or not to Act, he lies in the Face of *God*, and his own *Conscience*, that presumes without a full Perswasion. The most Effectual Method, I know of, to Settle and Compose the Doubt of our *Conscience*, is to be Contented with those Probable and Moral Evidences, that Things are capable of, and to suspect the Illegality of Nothing but what lies under a Positive Prohibition, either from the incontestable Demonstrations of Reason, or the express Words of Scripture, according to that Rule of the Apostle in a Case of the same Nature, which may be a standing Direction to us in all others, *I know, and am perswaded*

16 *The Nature, Obligation, and Measures of Conscience.*

added (says he) by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing Unclean of it self: but to him that Esteemeth anything to be Unclean, to him it is Unclean, Rom. 14. 14.

2. *Secondly, To Quit a Scrupulous Conscience.* And in this Case, I think, there is often more need of a Physician, than a Confessor; for the Body (as I said before) is generally more out of order, than the Soul. For those Groundless Misapprehensions, Misgiving Jealousies, and Imaginary Fears, that usually disturb its Repose, are many times, not so much the Results of Reason, as the Natural Effects of Vapours and Melancholly; and what are to be Cured, rather by a Corporal, than a Mental Application. If they are not Prejudicial to the Health of the one, they can scarce effect that of the other; and deserve, in some Cases, to be Answer'd with Neglect and Contempt. However, it is the Duty of such Persons, whose just Scruples proceed from the Ignorance of, or Mistakes in, the Knowledge of the Means of Salvation; or from the terrible Dread of God's Judgments, and the Consciousness of their own manifold Iniquities; to have Recourse to those Spiritual Guides only, whom Christ, and his Church has set over them, to Watch for their Souls; that from them they may receive Sound Instruction in their Faith, Fatherly Advice in their Conduct, and Ghostly Consolation in their Troubles. And let all such Persons rest assur'd, that the Ruine of their Souls, will as inevitably follow, as the Destruction of their Bodies, if at any time they presume to trust the State of either, with Itinerant Quacks, and pretending, ignorant Empiricks in Physick, or Divinity.

3. *Lastly, To Correct an Erroneous Conscience.* In order to which this Maxim must be observ'd: That the Conscience misapprehending the Nature of any thing, may from its being essentially Good, or indifferent, render it accidentally, and relatively Evil, to the Person so erring in his Conceptions: But on the contrary, no Misapprehension of the Conscience, can render any thing that is Evil, or Illegal, *in it self*, any ways Good or Valid. For a Man may be bound by his Opinion, in the one Case, but can never by it, justify himself, or alter the Unchangeable, and Intrinsic Nature of Things in the other. It is a most wretched, unhappy, and slavish Condition to follow an Erroneous Guide; for which way soever we take, either with, or against this Erring Conscience, we are Concluded under an Unavoidable Necessity of Sinning: for if we obey its Commands, we Neglect our Duty; and if we do our Duty, we Sin against our Judgment. And tho' it may seem safest to Transgress upon the Side of Conscience, yet the Mistake of That can never be a Plea for Unjustifiable Actions. What a Fatal Dilemma does the Devil, and a Man's own Folly bring him into in this Case! He casts a stumbling Block, and a Rock of Offence before himself, which he cannot avoid Falling and Splintering upon. So unhappily do some Men Fetter themselves with their own Notions, and lay such Chains and Burdens upon their Consciences, as they are not able to bear. There is but One Way to get out of this Hellish Snare, and that is to *break these Bonds, and cast these Cords from us:* To Examine thoroughly our Principles, and to Resist our Judgments; to Divest our selves of Interest, Prejudice and Affection; to keep the Upper Region of the Soul Clear and Serene, neither Clouded by Lust, nor Discomposed with the Heats of Passion; for these never fail to stupify and befog the Mind, and will in time, not only make the Conscience Insensible, but (in the elegant Language of the Scripture) *sear it with a Red-hot Iron.* To prevent which Lamentable Condition, we must frequently Retire into Our Selves, to state and adjust the great Accounts betwixt God and our Souls; that no Crime may pass unretracted, no Slip unobserv'd, no Infirmity uncorrected, no Presumptuous Sin unsubdued. Thus we shall preserve a tender and quick Sense upon the Mind, the least approaches of Vice, will alarm and rouse its Faculties; that no Temptation may surprize, no Passion entice into Guilt. Since it is so easily Betray'd into, and so difficultly Reclaim'd out of an Error, we cannot with too severe Circumspection watch over all its Motions, obey all its Checks, and revere its Verdict and Sentence. Which Labour however, will be amply Rewarded with the Blissful, and Rejoicing Testimony of a good Conscience, *that in Simplicity, and Godly Sincerity, not with Flisly Wileom, but by the Grace of God, we have s' bad our Conversation in this World, that our Conversation will be always (what it has bin in some measure here too) in Heaven.* Upon this Depends all the Tranquility, Peace, and Enjoyment of this Life; as well as the Happiness of the next. For the reviling Clamours, and upbraiding Reproaches of a *Wounded Spirit who can bear?* When that which should sustain a Man's Infirmities, is it self broken and confounded, what can support him, thus bereav'd of his Last Comfort, and left destitute of the very Pillar and Bottom that he must stand upon? He must inevitably sink, that thus Fails in the Foundation. So much is it our Interest, as well as Duty, if we ever think to Bear up against the Calamities of this World, or to go with Satisfaction into the Next, and manfully meet Death in its most Ghastly Village *can continually to Exercise our J. w. s, to keep a conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Men.*

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